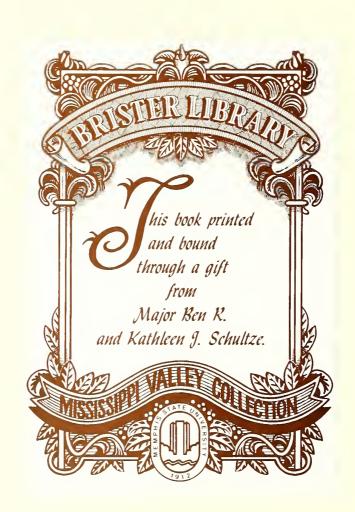
LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS INTERVIEW WITH WOODY FORBES

BY - MICHAEL FREEMAN

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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JANUARY 4, 1984

BY

MICHAEL FREEMAN

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THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE
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INTERVIEW IS WITH WOODY FORBES. THE PLACE IS 3338 OAKWOOD. THE
DATE IS JANUARY 4, 1984. THE INTERVIEWER IS MIKE FREEMAN.

Mr. Forbes: I don't come into the picture until the latter part of . . . In fact, when I first knew them they were out at the corner of Chelsea and Watkins. That was the tool shop. That was where they made all their tools, and Vic (Louder) was kind of in charge with . . . I probably shouldn't say this, but it is a matter of record. A fellow who did all the drawings—one man was responsible for all those drawings; his name was Sam, and I don't know his last name. But Sam did all the drawings. Sam was a junkie.

Mr. Freeman: I know that.

Mr. Forbes: You know that. And Sam . . . I remember one instance when Mr. Saunders was in a hurry to get some final drawings out. There was a shutdown on dope peddling here in Memphis. But you could get some in Helena, Arkansas. Mr. Saunders hired Sam a taxi and Sam went on that taxi, and it carried him to Helena, Arkansas . . . and he got his dope, and he came back. I watched him put the needle in his arm.

That's how . . . the main thing I thought about it--when I think about why I used to be interested, and I thought back over the thing . . . just how close they were to not having anybody do



a thing. Because Sam was the only person . . . Vic Louder was the kind of person . . . I mean he knew how to tool it; he probably could have gotten other folks and tooled up the thing (Keedoozle). Of course, you know all about what it was and what it was for.

Mr. Freeman: O. K., you didn't work for Saunders. You worked for who?

Mr. Forbes: I tell you. I taught school and on Saturdays I went out and worked in the Keedoozle store--just generally anything there was to be (done). They paid me 15 dollars a day and gave me all the bent cans I could haul. (laughs). There was a tremendous amount of bent cans.

Mr. Freeman: Why were they bent?

Mr. Forbes: Undoubtably--did you ever see the Keedoozle arrangement and know what it was?

Mr. Freeman: I've seen pictures.

Mr. Forbes: Let me tell you what I know about the situation. This last effort of his . . . there was a key--you hook it around if you wanted a can of tomatoes, you put it in a (slot) thing, and you punched it. That made a little hole in a piece of tape. When you got through, that (tape) just rolled around on your (key), and when you got through, you went to like a checkout stand. That lady took the tape off, and she stacked it through that thing (cash register), and each one of those holes trips a certain chute up, and this stuff fell out on a belt, and that is how the situation was. You know a lot of cans would get bent, and he gave me those bent cans. You can imagine yourself how many bent cans there were. That was one of the things why that thing wasn't very successful.



Mr. Freeman: Now my impression of the Keedoozle is that it broke down all of the time, and he had to keep a crew of electricians (on duty) all the time.

Mr. Forbes: A lot of folks. He had to have a lot of folks there all the time, plus the fact he lacked money to stock enough of everything he had in there. And when you went through, of course, if there wasn't a can there and you went through there and shopped for it, that can wouldn't show up, there wasn't anything to fall in the chute.

Mr. Freeman: Why didn't he have the money?

Mr. Forbes: It just wasn't available on the tail end of it, when I was there. That was in forty . . . I don't know. This thing (pointing to a stock certificate) was in 1947.

Mr. Freeman: 1948-49.

Mr. Forbes: No (pounds table), 1947. When he gave me this thing I was in business with his son Lee.

Mr. Freeman: You know Lee Saunders?

Mr. Forbes: Lee and I were partners in a business. We had

. . . during the war Lee worked for the War Manpower Commission,
and I worked for Du Pont. I was a mechanical engineer. Only time
I used my (degree). I wasn't a chemical engineer, but I did engineering work for them. I had a immediate supervisor who was
named Ty Cobb. I let him have some money to go in business with
Lee Saunders, in the employment business. Lee knew everybody in
the country. My boss and Lee thought they could do a good job in
the employment business, just a regular type of employment business.



They went into business as the Employment of Memphis Co. To make a long story short, and I won't tell you how, but Ty had to get out and I loaned him 4,000 dollars. I let him out of that and took his half of the business, (now) known as Saunders Personnel, for that 4,000. And that is how I got to know Lee Saunders. We were partners in another business.

Mr. Freeman: What was that?

Mr. Forbes: We manufactured golf putters called One-Putt.

And the way we got into it is when you couldn't get any steel for the shafts (World War II). We had bought the design from someone else. Anyhow, there was no steel shafts. Consequently, there was no putters. We thought we could end . . . we worked with Dow Chemical Co. on this . . . make a putter leaded heavy because the steel shaft was going to be much lighter, and we made a . . . we made, or Dow Chemical made for us, some shafts out of . . . what is lighter than steel?

Mr. Freeman: Metal?

Mr. Forbes: Yes, metal. Anyhow, we made a metal shaft, solid shaft and worked it and screwed it into the head of that putter. But it never did get anywheres, and we lost quite a bit of money on it. That's how I got connected with Lee Saunders.

Mr. Freeman: Did you know Lee Saunders that well?

Mr. Forbes: Well, very well. He and I were the best of friends even up to . . . I know his son Barry real well, and Barry could tell you Lee and I were close, close friends. Even after Keedoozle went out of business, we saw each other like regularly until he died.



Mr. Freeman: What kind of guy was Lee like, was he like his father?

Mr. Forbes: Well, Lee Saunders was what I consider a great guy. He was working on something all the time. He was always like his daddy, he thought big and always wanted to make big money.

Mr. Freeman: Was he successful?

Mr. Forbes: Very successful. In the latter part (of his life) he was a very successful food broker. He and Barry were in the food broker business. You know Barry?

Mr. Freeman: I have met Barry.

Mr. Forbes: Barry is one of the dog judges in the dog, field dog trial dogs in the country. I think he lives out there in . . .

Mr. Freeman: La Grange, Tennessee.

Mr. Forbes: I knew more about Lee, having been active with him in his business partnerships. In fact, I bought him out later on. He needed some money and I bought him out. I took the employment business myself and kept it for ten years.

Mr. Freeman: What employment business are you . . .

Mr. Forbes: Saunders Personnel. I just kept the same name.

Mr. Freeman: What kind of jobs?

Mr. Forbes: Industry. We were in competition with everyone in town. I had a girl named Ruth Mannerheim, Ruth Mann. She ran it for me on the halves. We were in the old Federal Building? Well, it was right there on Third and Jefferson. We were in business there ten years.

As far as Clarence Saunders is concerned, I don't think anyone knew him that well. Mr. Saunders was just a hard working, dedicated man. Of course, the bulk of the time that I knew him was



when he had that Keedoozle Store--the last time they had it, and it went under. They locked up and closed up, but he kept on. He had an office at Beale and--the M and M Building at Beale and Main. Big old building there.

Mr. Freeman: It's gone now.

Mr. Forbes: It's gone now. That is the story of how I got this (Keedoozle stock certificate) right here. I saw Lee one day and I was talking to him about I don't know what. Then he said, "You know what you ought to do? Next time you get a chance, you ought to go down and see Dad. He's still in there pecking and beating away. Woody, he hasn't got a quarter, hasn't got a dime." Next time I decided to go to see him, I was on my way somewheres, and I went by to see Mr. Saunders. I said, "I got something I want to give you. I know you don't have any money. This is just a favor to you. You don't have anything. I want to give you some money," so I gave him a hundred dollar bill. He said, "Wait, let me give you this." He wrote that thing (stock certificate) out right there in April, 1947. That's "Automatic Systems Incorporated," that's the stock.

Mr. Freeman: That's his signature there?

Mr. Forbes: That is Clarence Saunders' signature. Let me see the other one.

Mr. Freeman: Who is the other one?

Mr. Forbes: I knew him. Let me tell you a story about him. His name is E. J. Johnson.

Mr. Freeman: Who is that?



Mr. Forbes: E. J. Johnson, Jr. He was just a backer, a worker with Saunders. He was always with Keedoozle. He knew him probably better than anyone in the country.

Mr. Freeman: Oh, right?

Mr. Forbes: Vic Louder and E. J. Johnson. E. J. Johnson was with Mr. Saunders from the beginning.

Mr. Freeman: What do you mean by that? All the way back to Piggly Wiggly?

Mr. Forbes: All the way back to Piggly Wiggly days.

Mr. Freeman: He wouldn't be alive today. His children might be. And Louder?

Mr. Forbes: I don't know whether they are both alive or not.

Mr. Freeman: No, Victor Louder is dead.

Mr. Forbes: I imagine E. J. Johnson is, too. His father was a doctor. E. J. had some money.

Mr. Freeman: Was E. J. about the same age as Clarence?

Mr. Forbes: Yes, somewhat, I'm sure.

But that is a piece of original stock (in Keedoozle). He kept them in his drawer, and he gave them away. He gave me one. He had a bunch in there with E. J.'s name on them. That's Clarence Saunder's original signature.

You know the story of the Pink Palace and how it was designed for. I saw the original designs many times.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, Barry showed me pictures.

Mr. Forbes: Did he show you the plans for the house? The plans were available. I have seen the plans. I have forgotten where they were. Anyhow, each one of the bedrooms had a . . . slide going



to the swimming pool, so when they got up and turn to walk . . . It was just outside on the balcony, and they had a slide that would slide right into that swimming pool. I saw the plans for it. Of course, I didn't know much about it. That is all I remember of the Pink Palace. I remember at the time, I thought, "Oh Lord, have mercy!"

Of course, I was in contact with Lee. I was a high school football coach, and, back in those days, I was interested in football. I called Lee one time. This is before I knew him, this is about 1935 or 36. He gave me a couple of tickets to go the the ball game. You know they had a professional football team.

Mr. Freeman: Sole Owner Tigers.

Mr. Forbes: Lee gave me a couple of tickets, and he would have given me some for my football teams . . . tickets, because I knew Red Cavette and all those players. I noticed where the boy who played tackle died just the other day (Cliff Norvell). There's xomebody who knows Clarence Saunders.

Mr. Freeman: Red Cavette?

Mr. Forbes: . . and Red Cavette is still living.

Mr. Freeman: So, Vic Louder didn't really do much of the planning or designing of Keedoozle?

Mr. Forbes: Yeah, Vic was a designer and planner. That's what Vic did. Vic really designed the whole thing. It was Vic's baby to design. Vic knew all about dyes and all that kind of stuff that it took to make those parts. Vic was in charge of that shop out there.

Mr. Freeman: What did Saunders do?

Mr. Forbes: Well, he was just around. He was pushing, trying to hunt money all the time. That was his basic thing. The reason he was successful in getting up as much money as he did for this thing . . . very few people thought it would work . . . was that there was so many people in the grocery business that didn't think his first thing, the Piggly Wiggly, would work. They didn't think it would work. When this thing came along (Keedoozle), he got millions of dollars from people who said to themselves, "If we don't do this, and he makes it, boy, we will be in a mess. We are going to get us some." I think Lee thought that, too. He sold 50% of the stock to grocery (businessmen) . . . they were frightened people. And it was close, it (the Keedoozle) would work some of the time.

Mr. Freeman: Did Saunders actually do any of the designing, inventing?

Mr. Forbes: I think it was all his idea originally, his and Vic's. I think someone told me that, I don't know if it is true. Vic put the spark in it (to Saunders) how you could do this after Piggly Wiggly.

Mr. Freeman: How much work did Tunkie do?

Mr. Forbes: Nothing. Tunkie was just a . . . you know Lee (he means Clarence) divorced Mrs. Saunders, she wouldn't take a nickel, and married Pat, his secretary.

Mr. Freeman: You mean Clarence.

Mr. Forbes: Yes, Clarence.

Mr. Freeman: She was his secretary?

Mr. Forbes: Pat was his secretary when he divorced Lee's mother. There was Lee, Clay, and Amy Clare.



Mr. Freeman: I know about Clay, he died real young.

Mr. Forbes: He died real young. He was wild, my God!

Mr. Freeman: I've heard stories.

Mr. Forbes: I've seen some of them. I lived in Millington (near the air field) and the things he would do in an airplane you wouldn't believe.

Mr. Freeman: What about Amy Clare? Were you that close to the family?

Mr. Forbes: Well, I was not that close to know Amy Clare that well. I did not know her that well.

Mr. Freeman: Did you know Pat Saunders that well?

Mr. Forbes: I knew her because she was around all the time.

Socially, I didn't socialize with them at all . . . Because, as far as Pat was concerned, she didn't know I was doing anything, she didn't know of my relationship with Lee. I don't think Lee . . . I don't know whether or how they got along. I was not close to Pat. I haven't seen her since the day Clarence . . . I got that paper right here.

Mr. Freeman: So Tunkie is a few years younger than you?

Mr. Forbes: I don't know, Tunkie was not part of the business. I'm 71 years old. Tunkie was just her son and had nothing to do with anything. I never saw Tunkie over working like I did. I came on Saturdays and worked for the old man on anything that needed to be done, stocked groceries for fifteen dollars a day. I got easy money and all the bent cans and wonder what was in them. It was a great thing to open a can and not know what was in it. (laughs).



Mr. Freeman: You worked for . . .

Mr. Forbes: I worked for Mr. Saunders. The reason I was there was Lee, because Lee and I were so close, and we were in business together.

Mr. Freeman: Was Lee Saunders, did he look like his father? See, I don't see that many pictures of him.

Mr. Forbes: I reckoned he favored his father.

Mr. Freeman: Same height?

Mr. Forbes: Yeah, same height. He probably looked closer to him in looks than the others. They were of small stature.

 ${\tt Mr}_{\circ}$ Freeman: And he was not involved like Clay in the wild parties.

Mr. Forbes: Oh no, he was an altogether different individual.

He worked for the War Manpower Division--worked for them for years,

all during the war (World War II).

Mr. Freeman: Did you know his wife?

Mr. Forbes: Oh yeah, I knew his wife, his daughter. I visited them many times. Their house was over off Central. They lived there for years and years. I visited them regularly.

Mr. Freeman: Is she still alive?

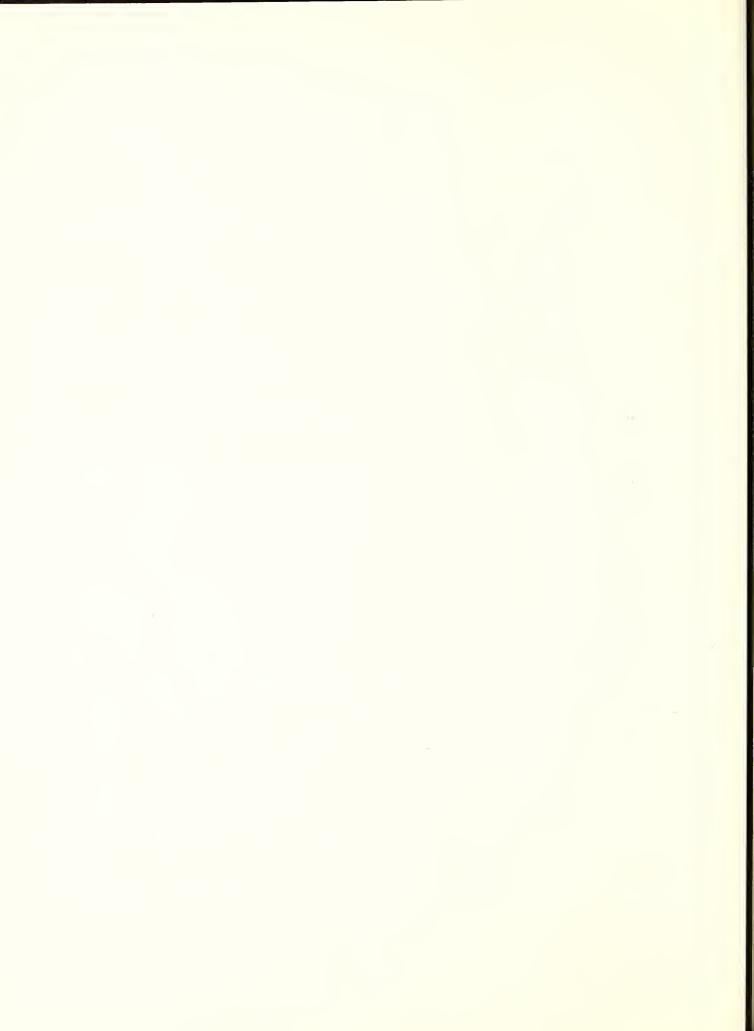
Mr. Forbes: No, she died before Lee.

Mr. Freeman: Her name was Hill. Mary Hill.

Mr. Forbes: Mary Hill. Her folks owned the property that the Sterick Building (Third and Jefferson) is on, the land.

Mr. Freeman: Her family is old Memphis.

There were several Keedoozles, right? There was one about 1946.



Mr. Forbes: The only one that I was involved in was at Poplar and . . . Union Extended.

Mr. Freeman: That's the last one.

Mr. Forbes: That's the last one. They were making the parts for that over at Chelsea and Watkins.

Mr. Freeman: The others were around 1939-1938.

Mr. Forbes: That's right. That was before my time. This thing here (Keedoozle stock certificate) was 1947. But he had already gone under and had closed up. He was down there still trying. Still had that suit on, had those shoes shined every day. He was an immaculate dresser--coat and tie on.

Mr. Freeman: What was he like to work with? Was he easy to get along with?

Mr. Forbes: Well, I wasn't around him that much. I was just a fellow working in the store. He . . . was a great thinker. Man, he didn't think about anything but millions of dollars, that was all he could think of. I consider him a great old individual. I really do. I thought a lot of him as an individual, for what, I don't know; I reckon for his doggedness, his . . . the problems that he had, and what he would do to overcome them.

Mr. Freeman: What kind of problems did he have?

Mr.Forbes: Well, you know, money problems. Always had money problems. That's exactly ... he ran out, literally ran out of money. Nobody would ship him anything, sell him any groceries. He couldn't pay anybody.

Mr. Freeman: Oh, really?



Mr. Forbes: No, it wasn't . . . I don't know what you knew about it, but it wasn't a matter of a guy coming to a standstill. He fought teeth and nail, he did everything. I remember one time, just to generate business, he hired a nigger band. Had them playing on a Saturday morning, playing beat music, playing the blues. Sitting there in front of that Keedoozle.

Mr. Freeman: Just to get people in?

Mr. Forbes: Just to get people in. Of all the things, a nigger band in a grocery store.

Mr.Freeman: Did it work? Did anybody come in?

Mr. Forbes: Well, you know, the general trade came in. It didn't do anything. But he would get ideas like this, just some things you wouldn't believe.

He wasn't the type of person anybody would hire because he was super-hyper.

Mr. Freeman: He was hyper?

Mr. Forbes: He was on a high all the time.

Mr. Freeman: Did he talk a lot?

Mr. Forbes: Obviously, he was on a high. No, he didn't talk a lot, except that he was interested in the cash register and how much was in it. That was his main interest. He would have meetings and talk to the group as people. He just lined everybody up and told them what he wanted to do.

Mr. Freeman: Was he the top dog all the time?

Mr. Forbes: Oh yeah. He was either going to be the top dog, or nothing. He called all the shots, absolutely, all the time.



Mr. Freeman: Were he and Mr. Louder friends for a long time?
Mr. Forbes: Yeah, as far as I know, Vic was around all the
time. Vic was just like me, or anybody else. Vic just worked for
him, and he let everybody know it—that Vic just worked for him,
even though somebody said . . . I don't know, I just heard that Vic
had the original idea; this mechanical store was an idea Vic came
up with. Of course, E. J. Johnson had money. Those three things
come together. E. J. hung in there. He (Saunders) paid him a
salary, I reckon as long as he signed that thing right here (the
Keedoozle stock certificate), he worked on Mr. Saunders' payroll
right then to some degree, how much, I don't know. Because Mr.
Saunders was still trying to move some things. I don't know.

After awhile nobody would talk to him.

Mr. Freeman: Really?

Mr. Forbes: You know, there wasn't anything at the end to sell--after that last thing played out, nobody was interested.

Didn't anybody ever tell you that there was one system sold?

Mr. Freeman: No, I don't remember hearing about it.

Mr. Forbes: How true this is, I don't know, I believe that he sold a system to Hickock Belts.

Mr. Freeman: Hickock Belts?

Mr. Forbes: Hickock Belts was a big belt manufacturer. I heard he got the money out of Hickock Belts. They actually tooled up and set up a system. You can imagine a bunch of belts packaged somewhere. (With Keedoozle) you could run a tape through there, rather than someone going there picking up all those orders and



let those things come out on a (conveyor) belt. The only thing he ever sold outside the city limits was to Hickock Belts.

Mr. Freeman: The company changed it to run a warehouse?

Mr. Forbes: Yeah, they put it up in a storage warehouse. For instance, if they wanted a dozen of this, 12 of that, they just keyed it in and kept the chutes full of certain belts and other items, and that's the way it was.

SIDE TWO

Mr. Forbes: It would be hard for me to tell you how the Keedoozle store worked.

Mr. Freeman: Why?

Mr. Forbes: When you saw how, how many electrical problems you can have to foul up that thing . . . and, Brother, when it got fouled up, I mean there was cans and this and that coming down there. Joe Blow is standing there like you go into Seesel's and have yours (groceries) in a package . . . here is the tape, and this little girl (the cashier) starts that tape through there (the cash register) and here comes all those cans and, of course, you had several checkout stands where you could cut this order off, and the next order would come this way . . . they (the cans) would come down this one big belt, but you could dump an order on that belt and know when it would quit. Most people had to know what they were doing, and they take this order . . . that went into the circle here. This is a common ground (he draws an imaginary diagram of the Keedoozle conveyor belts) . . . that belt came to here, this belt went to there, or it would come right on top of you if you didn't do anything.



I think the idea was good, but I doubt if it would ever seriously work under any circumstances. Of course, there are certain types of people who start to do something, whatever it is, and can't get it to sell. I doubt seriously if it would ever work in the grocery business. But, from what I know, I'm not that type of engineer, but I don't think he ever had a chance of making groceries (work). I've thought of other things, he might have made the unit (so) that it may distribute . . .

Mr. Freeman: A kind of warehouse type thing?

Mr. Forbes: But he wasn't interested in that. He just wanted to do groceries because that was all he knew, and that was all he wanted to talk about.

Mr. Freeman: Did you grow up in Memphis:

Mr. Forbes: I grew up in Tipton County.

Mr. Freeman: Tipton County. Did you know of Saunders back when he had Piggly Wiggly?

Mr. Forbes: No, I heard of Sole Owner of My name. Everybody heart of that; it was in all the papers. Officially, I heard nothing about it. They had one right across from Bry's (Main and Jefferson) when they first started. I was just a kid then. I remember the thing. I knew nothing. I was not connected with them. First time I had an opportunity and knew about it was when I got interested in this golf club he (Lee) had, and I called him and got in touch with Lee. Lee was a very nice individual, and when Lee got into a little tight . . . money (problem) with this guy, Ty Cobb, I knew him well enough to say this is a man I want to do business with.



That was the main reason why, the spark in me, because he listened to me, just a country school teacher, a coach out there. They were flying high in those days, Boy, I tell you.

Mr. Freeman: They lived well, huh?

Mr. Forbes: Well, they never did wild things. They lived well. Lee had his place just off Central. He and Mary Hill had enough money to do what they wanted to, but they lived in that little place. Of course, Barry had his things.

Mr. Freeman: Tell me more about this guy, Sam. He was a drawer, a draftsman.

Mr. Forbes: That's all I know about him. He drew all the drawings.

Mr. Freeman: Of the fine detail of the machines?

Mr. Forbes: Of the parts, the parts of the machine that made up that Keedoozle. Jillions, thousands of parts. Sam drew every one of them. He was the guy that knew how to make it work.

Mr. Freeman: Now, how in the world did Saunders find him?

Mr. Forbes: Don't have any idea. I don't know where Sam came from. When I first met him, Sam was bent over a drawing board. Can you imagine what would have happened to the whole Keedoozle system if there wasn't any Sam? I don't know how much they were paying him, but that's all Sam was.

Mr. Freeman: Was to draw?

Mr. Forbes: That is all he would do. The nicest going, long, tall, Ichabod Crane looking fellow you ever saw. He was as nice as could be. He always looked like he was sleeping over that drawing board. He didn't have much time to chat, to talk to you, he



stayed busy over that board. That was all he wanted to do, was draw, but he was a master at it. I'll tell you, if he ever had any . . . I don't know his background. I don't know if he had any formal training, or whatever, but if there was one thing, he was a fine draftsman.

Mr. Freeman: Barry told me a few things about him.

Mr. Forbes: Barry knew him well.

Mr. Freeman: Barry told me Lee took care of him for years.

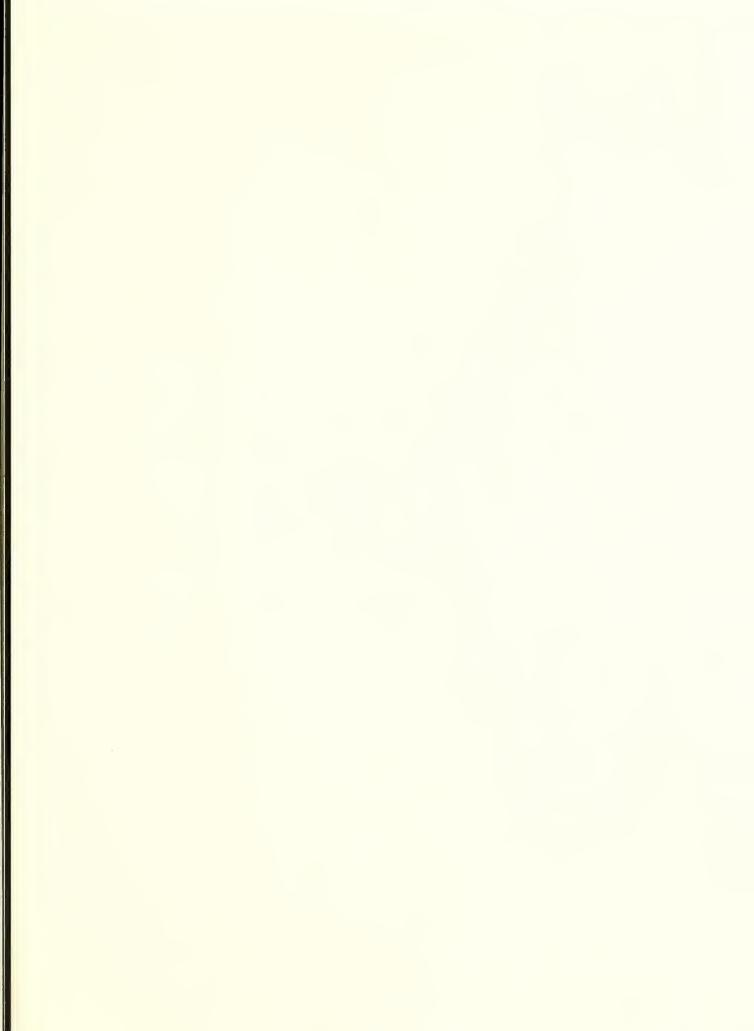
Mr. Forbes: Well, they probably did long after maybe, because I didn't follow him up that well . . . Lee would have done that, and had no reason to, except out of respect for his father. Lee Saunders, in my estimation, was one of the finest people I ever had any business with. You could depend on him, on whatever he said, there was just no question about him. Of course, I knew Barry when he was a boy, just visiting their house.

Mr. Freeman: Funny how Clay was so different.

Mr. Forbes: Clay was one of those who had a lot and let it get to him. All he ever wanted was airplanes and cars.

I never did read the fine print (of the Keedoozle stock) because I knew when he gave that, it was just . . . that he never would make a comeback with it. It wasn't any way he could make a comeback because he exhausted every way he could to fight. Everybody he knew that would give him money, and the grocery business that said (it) wasn't going to work. Of course, there were many big grocery chains that gave him thousands of dollars because they were afraid, as you might know they would be, when they, when they





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